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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002111

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ARRIVAL OF OSSETIAN FORCES WORSENS  
PROBLEM IN PEREVI

REF: TBILISI 1988

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary and comment. Ossetian forces now control the primary checkpoint south of the village of Perevi, Russian forces have established a new checkpoint north of the village, and as many as 200 villagers may have fled. International organizations have been unable to gain access to the village, however, and the situation on the ground remains unclear. These new developments increase the likelihood of provocation, make ethnic cleansing a real possibility, and underscore an ongoing violation of the cease-fire. Th EU Monitoring Mission considers Perevi a "Mini-Akhalgori" and believes the EU should push back hard on Russia and obtain withdrawal of the checkpoint before the Nice Summit. End summary and comment.

#### THE OSSETIANS MOVE IN

¶2. (SBU) Perevi is an ethnically Georgian village with a population of about 1,100 located along the western side of the administrative boundary of South Ossetia (nearly straight east from Sachkere). Russian forces established a checkpoint just south of the village after the August conflict. On every map known to post, from both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, the village lies outside the boundary, and both the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and the OSCE believe the village to be outside South Ossetia. The location of the checkpoint is somewhat more controversial, with some maps showing the checkpoint location outside the boundary, while at least one Soviet-era map suggests it could be right on or just inside the boundary. Both the EUMM and the OSCE believe the checkpoint is outside South Ossetia, however, and Russian soldiers at the checkpoint have admitted as much to both organizations. See reftel for additional background.

¶3. (SBU) On November 8, the EUMM and the OSCE observed Ossetian forces largely replacing Russian forces at the checkpoint. Although the Ossetians may have remained under Russian command at first, the EUMM reported that the checkpoint was entirely under Ossetian control by November ¶12. Neither mission has observed any provocative behavior by the Ossetians at the checkpoint. The EUMM also reported that Russian forces have established a new checkpoint north of Perevi, near the village of Sinaguri, which may be inside South Ossetia. No international monitors have been able to visit that location.

¶4. (SBU) The Georgian Interior Ministry and press reports indicate villagers have been intimidated by Ossetian forces, such as by shooting in the air and drunken behavior. Both sources also indicate some villagers, primarily women and children, have fled the village; the Interior Ministry estimates the total number at 200. Local schools have reportedly closed. The Interior Ministry has also stated publicly that Ossetian forces could be preparing to undertake

ethnic cleansing. Neither the EUMM nor the OSCE has seen evidence of Ossetians moving into the village or of such large numbers of villagers departing, but neither mission has been allowed access to the village since November 8. Post is not aware of any reports of violence in or near the village.

15. (SBU) Both the EUMM and the OSCE have been sending patrols daily to Perevi since November 8. The trip takes over three hours from the EUMM's nearest base in Gori, however, and over four hours from the OSCE's headquarters in Tbilisi. In an effort to gain a better sense of the situation, the EUMM began on November 10 to have patrols overnight in Sachkere. This is the largest town of any size in the area, and it is the likely destination for any villagers fleeing Perevi. Having patrols based there allows the EUMM to watch for evidence of such departures and to approach Perevi earlier each day. As noted, neither mission has yet observed evidence of large-scale departures.

#### STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

16. (SBU) At first glance, Perevi and its environs would seem to have little strategic value. Unlike Akhalgori, for example, they are not located near a transportation route of national significance (see reftel). On November 12, however, the EUMM's Head of Mission, Hansjorg Haber, described the situation to the Ambassador as a "Mini-Akhalgori," because the circumstances raise similar concerns. Perevi does in fact have some strategic value. The village sits on a road that leads into South Ossetia, and the checkpoint to its south sits at the juncture of two roads that both lead in. According to the Interior Ministry, these roads provide the

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primary access for two valleys and several villages inside South Ossetia, especially in winter: Jalabeti, Sinaguri along the northern road, and Tbeti, Gvidzga, and Kardmani along the southern road. Other roads lead to these villages from within South Ossetia, but they are impassable in winter. It would therefore be in the South Ossetian de facto authorities' interest to maintain control over Perevi in order to ensure access to the other villages year-round. Haber echoed these issues in his description of the Russians' interest in maintaining control of the area.

#### COMMENT: A SERIOUS CEASE-FIRE VIOLATION GETS WORSE

17. (SBU) The situation in Perevi represents a cease-fire violation even more egregious than that in Akhalgori. Unlike in Akhalgori, Russian forces have been maintaining a presence outside the administrative boundary of South Ossetia, and now they have facilitated an Ossetian presence there. The two sets of forces also severely restrict access to a village that is both ethnically Georgian and indisputably outside South Ossetia. Now, with the arrival of Ossetian forces, the likelihood of provocative acts from either side has increased considerably, and a real possibility of ethnic cleansing has emerged. Although the EUMM and OSCE are working hard to keep tabs on the situation, international pressure will likely be necessary to ensure compliance with the cease-fire and the prevention of violent incidents or worse.

TEFFT